

“Anarchy is a good word...”



Two essays by  
Eliphalet Kimball



# Civilization – Anarchy

by Eliphalet Kimball

The word civilization comes from the Latin word *civitas*, a “city,” – or *civis* a “citizen,” and signifies Government, and its effect on society. The effect of government is ignorance, falsehood, luxury, inequality, aristocracy, crime, and unhappiness. Such, then, is civilization. It is evil, and progress in evil. Culture of science, enlightenment, and progress in agriculture and art, are not effects of made-Governments. They are not civilization, and have no connection with it. Born-government is their genial soil, in which they would best flourish.

To call civilization good, and anarchy evil, is a want of reflection, and with aristocrats it is connected with a want of goodness. The advocates of law, like the advocates of religion, have got everything wrong end first. The word anarchy derives from two Greek words, *a* or *an*, “without,” and *arche*, a “head” or “beginning.” The universe is in a state of anarchy, always was, and ever will be so. Order is a sure effect of anarchical Government, and under any other Government, it is impossible. The effects of anarchy on society is visible in a hive of bees, a village of beavers, a hill of ants, a flock of wild pigeons, or geese, in their passage, and among all other animals. The story that honey bees are governed by a queen is not true. All Nature contradicts it. The social life of beasts is good. Beasts are worthy of respect. Mankind in general believe in great falsehoods and wrongs for truth and right, but beasts do not. In some kinds of knowledge they are superior to man. For my part, I never kill any of them except bed-bugs and mosquitoes. I consider they have the same rights that I have. Even trees of the forest avoid injuring each other – they put forth few or no branches that can interfere with their neighbors. Undoubtedly, it is the same with their roots. By injuring their neighbors they would injure themselves.

Nature has no straight lines for matter, nor for mind and morals. If the stars in the sky, and the trees in the woods were to be arranged in straight rows, it would be disorder for them. A river forced to run in a straight line would be in disorder. – Man-made law is straight lines for mind and morals. That moral disorder is the consequence, is attested by the social condition of every civilized and half-civilized people. The regularity of art is irregularity, when applied to Nature. To make straight rules beforehand for all future occasions, is the extreme of folly and harm. Leave it all until the occasion comes, and then everything would naturally settle itself easy and right. The attempt of man to regulate society by art, concurs with the religious idea that the Universe is a work of art from the hands of a God. If there is a God, and the Universe is his work, then there is no Nature. If there is a Nature, it proves there is no God. God and Nature cannot both be.

It is the fault of the radical reformers, that they are not radical enough. They think something must be done to regulate society, when in truth doing anything is doing too much. Any general arrangement of organization whatever by man is sure to bring evil without good, because it conflicts with the laws of order and harmony which prevail in the anarchical Universe. "Building up" has done all the mischief. Made-rules of any kind are like a board put over the top of a chimney which fills the house with smoke. To settle a bucket of riley water, it must be left alone. There is no such thing as being too radical unless a person can be too rational. No society can ever be in good condition in which are men of large capital. Under born-Governments and accumulation of great wealth by any one man would be impossible. Occupation of the land would be just what it ought to be. Every person would cultivate what he needed for a plain support, and would not in general wish for more. All would be willing he should have it. Where nobody claimed our land, there could be no disputes about it. All or nearly all would be disposed to do as they would be done by. The dispositions of mankind would be entirely different, and better than they are under made-Government. A wrong if attempted could not in general be carried out against the general sentiments of the community. Under anarchy, all would turn out cheerfully to do their part in making roads. Whatever is necessary for the people to do unitedly can be done better without law than with it. It is to be hoped the people would have good sense enough to abolish all public schools. They are a great injury to the young. At home and alone is the place to study, and parents are the proper teachers for their children. Nobody can study well in company.

Abolish all public schools. Children are literally schooled to death. The growing brain is tender and unable without injury to bear much labor. It needs quietude to grow and strengthen. The mind and the whole system are weakened by close attention to study in youth. In the schools of this country the minds of the young are crammed with what they are not old enough to understand. Little that is useful is taught at school or college. Napoleon said that he never learned anything at school that was ever of use to him, except mathematics. Confinement in school is violence to nature, and great injury to the health. Freedom in the open air is the place for children, and they have no business with much learning. Through the influence of the clergy, children are not allowed a day of rest from study – their brain labor is kept up in Sunday schools. To cram nursing infants with beef steak and baked beans would not be more unreasonable and injurious than the school system of the United States. Under anarchy all would be producers with no useless and injurious classes. Consequently nobody would have to work more than three or four hours a day, and parents would have leisure to teach their children, and improve their own minds by reading and reflecting. Except learning to read and write, study should be put off till the age of maturity, both for the sake of health, and that they may have judgment to choose their own studies, and understand them. The riper the mind, the more progress is made. Good education, of course, is of great importance, but it is a shallow opinion that education preserves virtue and freedom.

Learning makes nobody good nor free. The uneducated laboring class have the most virtue. Masters might safely educate their slaves, for they could gain their freedom no sooner by it. Even without education, anarchy would preserve virtue and freedom. Laboring people with little learning use more good sense than those who are called educated, and savages more than civilized people. No person's education is finished until death.

Luxury and show are enemies to virtue and freedom. They are ruin to any people. Human Government is their cause, and anarchy or the course of Nature would abolish and prevent them. Almost everything in this country is spoiled with what is called "ornament." Whatever is added to an object only for ornament is in reality deformity. Nature adds nothing for ornament. Painted houses and papered rooms are not pleasing to persons of good mind. All beauty is plain. All truly handsome faces are plain. Beautiful flowers are plain. – Nature never changes the style of its dress. A good style is always good. Any old dress, if clean, is decent and respectable. A rich and showy one is not decent.

The most respectable dress is a ragged one covered with dirt and sweat, worn by an honest laboring man. Great principles are connected with the subject of dress.

A weekly day of rest is part of civilization, as it is enforced by law. It is unnatural and unsuitable. – No person can labor all day without injury to his constitution – to say nothing of six days. Instead of a weekly day of rest, it ought to be hours of rest every day. Healthy and strong persons who do but little labor, are injured by a day of rest, for they need labor enough to for exercise every day. With regard to the religious character of the day, no line can be drawn between works of necessity and those which are not. Either all work is necessary on the Sabbath, or none is, not even "boiling a teakettle," or making a bed. It might be necessary for a poor man with a family to labor on Sunday. Anarchy would abolish a weekly day of rest, for no person would need to labor more than three or four hours a day.

Mexico is about to have a monarchy forced upon her by Napoleon. In that country a few men hold all the land. A man's land there sometimes reaches eighty miles. In some parts of the country in a week's travel, all the land on both sides of the road belongs to the church. Two brothers named Sanchez own the whole State of Coahuila. Mexico needs anarchy to break up land ownership, and give the people each one a chance to take what land he needs. Monarchy, of course, will fasten the evil stronger upon them.

The world may be safely challenged for arguments in favor of the need or innocence of human law.

# Law, Commerce, and Religion<sup>1</sup>

by Eliphalet Kimball

Mr. Editor: – Law, Commerce, and Religion, are the causes of the wrongs, vices, and consequence sufferings which have always prevailed in civilized nations. Natural law, or the healing power of Nature, would regulate society as it does the human body. The mind of man is his body. Artificial law is a poison which deranges the course of Nature, and is sure to disorder society. The stillness of legal despotism is disorder. Artificial government turns morality upside-down, and keeps it so by force. It protects a class of bad men in wronging others, but is no benefit to honest men. Under established laws and forms of government, its full development is impossible.

Artificial law creates Commerce. Commerce makes rich men. The rich make the class of suffering poor, as a natural consequence. Commerce, and merchants, cause luxury, love of show, avarice, speculation, selfishness, dishonesty; – then comes aristocracy, and next monarchy. Our commerce with Europe is fast bringing society in the United States into the same condition with that in Europe. Monarchy in the United States is near. Law, Commerce, and Religion, make leading men. The leading men have ruined the United States, and made the nation not worth saving. Every rich man, every man who lives in showy style, is a curse to this country. Commerce was and is the cause of negro slavery. The nations which have most commerce are most unprincipled; for instance, England and the United States. It is pretended that Commerce promotes peace, civilization, and fraternity. The contrary is true. Commerce was at the bottom of the piratical wars of England in India, and China, and others the world over. Commercial avarice caused the great national crime committed by the United States against Japan, in forcing her to open her ports. The ruin of the Japanese dates from the visit of Commodore Perry to their shores. According to all accounts, Japan exceeds all other civilized nations in the condition and character of its inhabitants. It is comparatively the country of justice and equal rights, of plainness, mediocrity, and comfort. The people are correspondingly virtuous. For the last two hundred years, they have not had a war. The cause of their better state of society is, they have no commerce nor religion. They are a nation of Atheists. They were shocked at being told that the Americans believe in a God. The Japanese have only the social wrongs and faults of character that spring from law. The frequent civil wars in Mexico are owing, not to faults of the character of the people, but to their unequal condition, caused by law. The land of Mexico is in the hands of few men, and of the Church. The leading men, and the Church, are at the

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1. Eliphalet Kimball, "Law, Commerce, and Religion," *The Boston Investigator*, 32, 13 (June 30, 1862), 97-8.

bottom of the civil wars in that country. The inability of the French to maintain a republican government, is owing to the inequality of the people, caused, by Law, Commerce, and Religion, and not to the faults of national character. Commerce has hastened the degeneracy of the American republic. The leading men have corrupted society, and the government. The elections are controlled by money. The important offices are mostly filled with unworthy men. The powerful influence of mercantile wealth is brought to bear on Congressional legislation, to encourage Commerce for the gratification of avarice, and thus in effect increase prevailing wrongs. The American government made no open war on China, but their minister and war vessels sneakily accompanied the British expedition, to assist indirectly its piratical operations, and profit by its victories. Just wars are sometimes prevented by commercial selfishness. Commercial influence makes unjust wars and disgraceful peace, according to which brings the most money.

Religion is the resource of bad minds. It springs from ignorance, and want of reason, and is false in every particular. False principles cannot be otherwise than injurious to society. Religion and goodness are entirely different and separate. A person may be good without religion, or religious without goodness. Of course, he is not by nature a good man, who does right only from religious motives. All murderers, when in prison, and on the gallows, make known their belief in religion. The same want of reason and goodness that makes them commit murder, makes them believe in religion. Bad men are the strongest believers in the necessity of law and of future punishment. They think that all mankind, like themselves, are governed by nothing better than fear. Such men are the Christians. The followers of Jesus Christ are not good by nature. A follower is an imitator. The imitator is different by nature from the person imitated. Of course, those who imitate Christ do not resemble him in natural character. Those who are born good have to imitate nobody. They act out themselves. Priests declare that the world is governed by a God, and religion is necessary to keep people in order. At the same time they profess to believe that human law is necessary. Kings and aristocrats affirm that human government is indispensable, and at the same time they profess to believe that religion is necessary for society. To assert the need of divine law, and of human law also, proves a want of confidence in either. Both have been abundantly tried together, and found wanting. A God would have no right to create people, without asking their leave, nor govern them without their consent. The clergy are mostly aristocrats and monarchists. Kings and priests strengthen each other. The clergy preach the divine appointment of kings, and submission to powers that be, under penalty of eternal damnation. They are rewarded with a union of Church and State.

Nothing is easier than to have this world a good one, if people had reason enough to see the truth, and would apply it. Abolish all artificial law, and let

Nature take its course. Destruction is the word! Destroy the shallow and ruinous contrivances of men, and equality, virtue, justice, and comfort, would be the condition of the world. The laws of Nature would prevent extreme wealth in one class, and its natural consequence, suffering poverty, in another. Aristocracy would be impossible. An aristocrat is never a worthy man – he is ignoble. A government of the aristocracy is atrociously unprincipled and selfish. – In opposition to the rights of man, it sticks at no crime nor cruelty. Napoleon, the noblest man in the world, was entirely free of aristocracy, and despised it in others. No person can rightfully own land. Every person has the right to cultivate what he needs. Of course, there would be no quarreling about land, if nobody owned it. Fishermen never quarrel about unclaimed water. Under natural law, the few wrongs that would be committed, would be attended to by the people of the neighborhood. Punishment would be more sure than now. The law ought to be made for the occasion, and not before the crime is committed, as circumstance would make a difference in cases. – The right government of society would naturally correspond with the government of the Universe. The Universe is eternal, and, therefore, without beginning. It is boundless, and, therefore, has no place for a Creator to begin at, and no place to leave off. – It governs itself. Organization, fitness, life, mind, and growth, are but the inevitable effect of natural law. With reference to the works of Nature, design and chance are but the nonsense of fools. The earth and planets are obliged by natural law to revolve with regularity. It would take a God of great strength to stop them or turn them from their natural course. – If there is no God-law, of course there ought to be no man-law. Human law is unnecessary and injurious, so of course would be God-law. If there is a king of heaven, so ought there to be kings of earth. Under artificial, established laws, and forms of government, many deliberate acts of injustice go unpunished, and many rightful things are punished.

It is only by anarchy and violence that a great accumulation of social wrongs can be removed. Anarchy is a good word. It means, “without a head.” Violence is the healing power of Nature applied to society. The violence which would follow from the abolishment of law, would be in proportion to the number and magnitude of the wrongs that needed removal. There ought always to be anarchy, but there would be no violence where there were no wrongs. – Japan needs but little violence. Great Britain needs much. Nothing but violence could have accomplished the great French Revolution, the most beneficent and glorious event of modern times. Law and Religion are responsible for whatever was wrong in it. Mob law is the right law. Mobs assemble to do justice, to punish bad men whom the law does not reach, and to remove wrongs. There is more reason and justice in a large number of men than in a small number, more in a mob than in a Senate, House of Representatives, judges, or juries. The government of a State, or nation, is a mob, the government of the majority is a mob, and they are the only mobs that ought to be put down. If



mankind are not good enough to live without law, they are not good enough to vote for law-makers. Beasts and savages are not fools enough to believe in religion or law, and are good enough to live right without them. Christian and civilized men appear to consider themselves inferior in goodness to savages and beasts. In an uncorrupted state of society, mankind are inclined to do right. – If they were naturally inclined to evil, they would not make laws to prevent it. The fact that laws are made, proves that law is unnecessary.

West Campton (N. H.) July 1, 1862





*“...it means without a head.”*

Eliphalet Kimball is not one of the names that one generally associates with the early history of anarchism in the United States. Indeed, he is a mostly forgotten figure. But in 1862, he came out for his understanding of anarchy in the pages of the *Boston Investigator*—and not just for some philosophical program. Kimball was a proponent of transformative violence, a physician with an idea of social physiology that pointed towards the need for occasional bloodlettings, or at least for fevers and the lancing of boils. He was a man of many strong opinions (not all of which seem to align particularly well with current politically-correct standards) and an early anarchist critic of civilization. The two essays collected here should give a sense of the strength and the diversity of his idiosyncratic opinions, and serve as an introduction to a figure too colorful and eccentric to leave out of our anarchist histories.

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